

LIVING TOWARD A THEOLOGY, STRATEGY, AND
PRACTICE OF URBAN MINISTRY
(Survival Manual for Urban Christians)

A Professional Project
Presented to
the Faculty of the
School of Theology at Claremont

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Charles W. Elswick

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

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The United States is the most urban society in the world. Three-fourths or more of the country is urban. Cities present the church with both great challenges and opportunities for ministry. By and large the church in its various manifestations has not been prepared for the dramatic changes of urbanization. These changes have come so rapidly, been so numerous, that the urban church is in a state of crisis. Like crises in other contexts, the church is faced with very real dangers which may overwhelm her. She also has the option of significant growth and service.

The crucial question addressed in this project is: How may the community of faith in Christ be God's people in the city with integrity, compassion, and effectiveness? This "survival manual" for urban Christians is to provide a theological perspective, strategy, and practical means of doing the work of Christ in the city. A new and more comprehensive understanding of survival is set forth. This is done out of the context of seeing ministry as an ongoing process of living toward God's Vision of Shalom for all of creation.

While recognizing that there are many ways of being the church in the city, the author sets forth a model of local church urban ministry. It is an example that has grown out of ten years of doing theology, strategizing, and practicing ministry in the urban context of Southern California. The experiences and faith journey of First Christian Church, Santa Monica, illustrate the possibilities of the Gospel with faith and social action interrelated. Case study material and varied examples of local church networking, social services, and advocacy are shared. Crisis intervention theory and methodology are used as primary tools to understand and practice urban ministry in an environment of change and massive human needs.

It is assumed throughout this project that spirituality and social concern are integrally interrelated. Worship is a form of service and service is a form of worship. It is further concluded that creative understanding of life cycles, transitions, and crises provide a rich opportunity out of which to do theology, strategize, and practice intentional ministry. The central affirmation of God's being in Christ and giving to the church a ministry of reconciliation is the guiding vision and commission of the urban church.

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DEDICATION

Living Toward a Theology, Strategy, and Practice of Urban Ministry is hereby dedicated to the author's wife, Frances Nadine Elswick. Over the past two and a half years her patience, love, encouragement, and practical help have enabled this writer to stay focused and working on this project. Together, we have shared the joys and sorrows of urban ministry and parenting, growing both as persons and professionals in our respective fields of ministry and education.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

One of the most important chapters in manuals of instruction for backpackers and hikers is the section on survival strategy and tactics. In such manuals, helpful hints for surviving bad weather, getting lost, emergency conditions, and a host of other threatening circumstances are covered. Similar manuals are common place for experienced sportsmen and sportswomen, armed service training and recent astronaut preparation. Learning to survive in remote areas with limited resources, except one's own resourcefulness from the environment and helping one another, is often a matter of life and death.

The Problem of the Urban Church

The Church of Jesus Christ, particularly the urban church, has often found itself struggling to survive in a hostile environment. Like the Israelites of old, the urban church of America faces mountains on the sides, the seas in front, and a fast approaching enemy behind.¹ In the words of Pastor Roger Rogahn, Director of Los Angeles Metro Lutheran Ministry:

We have been ill-equipped to deal with those dramatic changes which were thrust upon us in the years since the mid-sixties, and the

¹ Exodus 14:10 (RSV).

tremendous quality and quantity of change which is projected for the next several years until the end of the century could easily overwhelm us.²

Some denominations and churches have given up on the inner city and abandoned urban churches for the suburbs. Still others have just allowed city churches to largely fend for themselves, to sink or swim. The so-called strategy has been akin to that of Gamaliel of the Book of Acts who said: "If this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!"³

This writer personally and professionally over the last ten years has pastored an old downtown church in Santa Monica, California. He has been part of a denomination that has not had a comprehensive theory, strategy, or practice of urban ministry. In fact, few mainline denominations, including the Disciples of Christ, have clear rationale, plans, or effective practice of urban ministry. This urban pastor has had to learn to survive by trial and error, networking with peers, amidst a constantly changing environment and congregation. Theology, strategy, and practice have grown out of being in ministry with people in the city. The challenge has been one of both maintenance

² Roger H. Rogahn, "Los Angeles: Colossus of the West," Address, L.A. Metro Lutheran Ministry, Los Angeles, March [Lent] 1984.

³ Acts 5:38-39 (RSV).

and mission. That is, how may the community of faith in Christ be God's people with integrity, compassion, and effectiveness?⁴

A New Understanding of Surviving

This survival manual for urban Christians is intended to provide a theological perspective, strategy, and practical means of doing the work of Christ in the city. It is grounded in God's gift of Shalom that is present, and yet assumes an ongoing process of living toward God's vision of Shalom for all of creation. A new, deeper, and more comprehensive understanding of survival will be set forth.

Just as there is no one way of doing ministry, neither is there only one way of being the church in the urban environment. There are many models, strategies, and theological foundations undergirding them. These instructions for survival for urban Christians will hopefully help each person, each congregation, each denomination examine its own priorities, models, and styles of ministry. There is much that urban Christians have to share with each other. We do not all have to reinvent the wheel. In fact, biblical and historical studies will show that the early church was primarily urban in nature.⁵ Such studies will also show that the urban church has great potential to help the

⁴ Charles W. Elswick, "Pentecost Sermon," Metro Disciples Covenanting Service, Los Angeles, June 1985.

⁵ Wayne A. Meeks, The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1983), 9.

whole Body of Christ to renew its life and mission. The urban church not only badly needs its suburban and county-seat sisters, but they need us as well! Survival manuals in various fields make it clear that far more than self-preservation is involved. To "survive" goes beyond individualism to interdependence with all of nature, cooperation with others, hard work, courage, and a deep sense of faith.

Recent events have shown to what lengths National Security Council aides of the President went to continue his policy of keeping the Contras alive in body and soul. Arms profits from weapon sales to Iran were diverted via various connections to Contra leaders. Private citizen groups were set up to collect donations. Methods of transporting goods in and out of Central America were established. All of this was done covertly, quietly, outside regular channels of government. While this writer abhors the arrogance of power, illegal strategies, and practices employed, one cannot help but admire the resourcefulness of those involved to get a difficult job done. Even so, the New Testament exhorts us as followers of the Christ to "be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."⁶ The dishonest steward also went to great lengths to insure his future by giving his master's debtors reduced settlements. "The master commended the steward for

⁶ Matthew 10:16b (RSV).

his prudence; for the sons of this world are wiser in their own generation than the sons of light."⁷

Theoretical Formulation

Urban Christians must know who and where they are theologically. Urban pastors and leaders must possess a keen sensitivity and knowledge of the context of their particular ministry. And certainly urban Christians must be well-equipped with the tools of ministry in a constantly changing environment. It is this urban pastor's bias that spirituality and social concern are integrally linked, not separate realities or dimensions. They inform and enrich one another. Worship is a form of service and service is a form of worship. Like faith and good works, prayer and ethics, Bible study and action, they go together!

Lucky Altman, Director of Interreligious Programs for the Southern California National Conference of Christians and Jews, focuses the challenge of urban ministry for the remainder of the twentieth century.

The urban environment needs the whole Gospel, for the whole person, in the whole world. Yet let us be clear that the rich kaleidoscope of cultures provides an exciting environment within which to serve, but also present significant stumbling blocks.⁸

⁷ Luke 16:8 (RSV).

⁸ Lucky Altman, Keynote Address, Urban Ministry Convocation, School of Theology Urban Institute, Los Angeles, Feb. 1985.

Much is required of the pastor and local congregation who would expect to make some sense of the various images and plurality of peoples in the urban environment. Multiple needs, ever-changing landscape, and contrasting cultures call upon Christian leaders to make creative use of short-term contacts. Longer-term methods of establishing relationships and solving problems in the church and within the community no longer apply to many areas of urban life. There simply is not sufficient time, opportunity, or energy to do so! Furthermore, creative understanding of life cycles, transitions, and crises provide a rich opportunity out of which to do theology, strategize, and practice intentional ministry.⁹

In summary, it is not a question of whether the church will do urban ministry, but with what kind of self-understanding and expertise. It shall be the purpose, rationale, and end of this manual to make clear that urban ministry can be done more thoughtfully, intentionally, and helpfully. With these things in mind, let us look toward further instructions which will set forth: (1) a theology (rationale), (2) a strategy (plan), and (3) a practice (means) of penetrating the city for Christ.

Chapter 2, Living Toward a Theology of Urban Ministry, will specifically set forth the historical context

⁹ Willard Robert Stevens, "Validity of a Single Encounter Ministry Within the Urban Setting," (Rel. D. diss., School of Theology at Claremont, CA, 1967), 23.

out of which Disciples' theology has developed. The modern perspective and diversity of present theological approaches will also lay the groundwork for doing practical theology in the urban context. Vision for such ministry is needed, which will help to bring together both theory and practice. But what kind of vision? What is our primary calling as urban Christians and leaders of the church the last years of the twentieth century? Is it not that of "daring to live toward the vision of God's Shalom?"¹⁰ Doing the Good News of the Gospel within this theological understanding affirms that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not counting their sins against them, but entrusting to us the ministry of reconciliation."¹¹ It is a theological task that brings word and deed, individuals and social structures together through the vision of God's Shalom.

Reflection upon and strategizing to do this kind of ministry will be central to Chapters 2 and 3. For what we shall be talking about is a theology of intervention and worldly confrontation, or dialectical practical theology. Case study material of what was learned from ten years of doing theology and urban ministry at First Christian Church of Santa Monica, California, will be shared. Such material

¹⁰ Walter Brueggemann, Living Toward a Vision (New York: United Church Press, 1976), 10.

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 5:19 (RSV).

will show forth a theology and strategizing of interdependence, stewardship, networking, and plans of action which fit the particular urban context.

Global vision and strategy rooted in the Table of the Lord, servanthood ministry, and incarnational faith are already bringing forth new understandings of God, community, and mission. These understandings have been incorporated into practical strategies and practices of urban ministry, which will be examined in Chapter 4. Crisis intervention theory and practice will be set forth as a primary means of responding to multiple human needs within the urban context, both inside and outside the church. In conclusion, however, Living Toward a Theology, Strategy, and Practice of Urban Ministry always involves constantly standing in need of God's Judgment and Grace. It is an ongoing process of worship and prayer, Bible study and reflection, personal and social ministry, success and failure.

In closing this introduction, standard operating procedure calls for definition of some terms which will be used throughout this manual. While some may seem rather obvious, they are not necessarily terms or definitions which are common to many lay leaders in the church or mean the same thing to theologians. Frequently used terms include the following definitions and characteristics of the city:

Urban - Refers to a description of a major metropolitan area, over against rural-farm area. Increasingly many urban areas run together, such as along the eastern seaboard and the

Southern California area. This paper will take the position that rural and urban America have more in common than previously thought.

City - Normally refers to large grouping of people who live, work, and interface in a certain geographical area. Large cities such as Los Angeles may have several cities within the city.

Interdependence - A relationship in which two or more persons or groups interrelate as equal partners.

Networking - The process of joining together with other people, to share information, brainstorm, and for mutual support.

System - Interconnections, relationships of various parts and/or members who form a whole such as family system, church or business system. We are all a part of many systems which overlap, interface, and affect one another. This is particularly true in urban areas.

Crisis - Situational or developmental time of transition, threat, or change. Offers a unique opportunity for growth, ministry, and social change.

Intervention - Act of strategically helping another when the other is in critical need and vulnerable. Crisis intervention theory and models are adapted from community mental health field.

Advocacy - The act of standing for another person or group, to enable justice on their behalf. Social service, advocacy and political action are seen as very interrelated in this project.

CHAPTER 2

Living Toward a Theology of Urban Ministry

Historical Perspective

Much has been written about the city and the urban environment, but often without a biblical or theological perspective being brought to bear upon it. On the other hand, one can find considerable material on the practical aspects of ministry with people in the city. The fallacy or shortcoming of most work done previously in the field of urban life is the failure to bring theory, strategy, and practice together in an integrated whole.

Historically the Disciples of Christ, like many other American religious groups, had their beginnings in predominantly rural soil along the nineteenth century frontier. It was there that the Campbellites grew out of Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist roots, and strongly identified with the rugged individualism of the day and age.¹ Shriver points out that American Christians simply must face the reality that their urban environment today was largely built by and on the forces of commerce. "Today's cities and urban secular culture are mostly products of the new commercialism of the last four hundred years of

¹ Hiram Lester and Marjorie Lester, Inasmuch---The Saga of NBA (St. Louis: National Benevolent Association, 1987), 22.

Euro-American urban development."²

Disciples of Christ, who celebrated the 100th Anniversary of their National Benevolent Association in 1987, can be proud of the small group of women who blazed a new trail for all American churches in the field of religious and social welfare work. However, this story of helping the helpless, the poor, the orphans, and the widows was largely local and an individual matter before gradually affecting the structures of the church.³

The idealism never caught up with the reality of expanding industrialization. In the transition to a world that became mechanistic and pluralistic, cities became cauldrons of poverty and disease; social and medical technology had not kept pace. Many children suffered the misery of being left parentless or of being abandoned on doorsteps. By 1880, the streets of American cities had become the only home for tens of thousands of children. The terrible struggle for bread so absorbs people; they have little time for anything else.⁴

The Gospel, as Meeks has pointed out, took root, grew, and spread from first and second century cities. The apostle Paul found himself preoccupied with trying to make the Gospel alive and stable in a deadly and unstable urban situation.⁵ Spiritual and social concerns, however,

² Donald W. Shriver, Jr., Keynote Address, United Methodist Urban Ministry Convocation, Los Angeles, 14 April 1986.

³ Lester, 22.

⁴ Ibid., 22-23.

⁵ Meeks, 9.

gradually became separated. Like various other churches in the country, the Disciples established congregations in cities across the United States and Canada. The leadership, though, continued to think, act, and plan largely in individualistic and rural terms.

Modern Perspective and Theology

Langdon Gilkey states that the tension between the sacred and a secular is the most critical issue of current theology.

Now, the deepest substantive question of current theology is, I believe, the mediation of this false opposition, an opposition untrue both to Scripture and to an adequate theological interpretation of history and human destiny. The overcoming of this split is also crucial for our common social being. It is important that the religious and moral forces, such as they are, of our communities become integrated creatively into our common political life, not only so that Christianity may be an inspiring and shaping factor in social reform and reconstruction, but also that it may mitigate those real possibilities, lying well in our future, of our participation in social oppression and social disintegration.⁶

There are several theological approaches to the challenge of urban ministry. Process theology, natural theology, philosophical theory, biblical theology, and others attempt to provide a comprehensive framework for grappling with the crucial issues and questions of our day and age. This writer has developed and opted for a theology that is essentially biblical, Christocentric, pragmatic,

⁶ Langdon Gilkey, Society and the Sacred (New York: Crossroad 1981), 42.

and concerned about the poor and outcast. It is a theology that is designed to inform and help persons and structures meet Jesus Christ in the secular world. The people and structures in turn bring their own agendas to Jesus Christ.

Practical Theology for an Urban Context

Some twenty-five years of parish work have convinced this writer that most pastors and local church leaders do not begin with academic theology but do practical theology. Much of theological education for ministry, however, has proceeded from a body of knowledge about God, Christ, and the Church, and sought to apply these concepts to practice. Confronted with specific, massive, and varied human needs and social conditions, urban theology calls for a dialectical way of bringing theory and practice together. God's living Word in Christ is brought into dialogue with real life situations--both personal and social in nature. One might speak of this as a practical liberation theology. For critical reflection-action upon both the Gospel and the urban context are essential. None of us comes to this kind of dialogue without the clothes of cultural biases and previous experiences. The author came to old downtown First Christian with fifteen years of rural and suburban ministry. He had worked as a family therapist, specializing in crisis intervention within varied social systems. The writer had goals and agenda for this new challenge but the human-social needs of the context called for larger vision, a new theology.

The Hebrew scriptures boldly state that "where there is no vision, the people perish."⁷ Surely this is true for the urban church and of the larger urban environment. But whose definition or vision of the "good city" shall we accept? Whose reading of the Bible? Whose understanding of history, the church? Shriver suggests a biblical approach to these important questions.

John Calvin took the position that the Bible is the "spectacles" by which Christians look at everything around them. The Bible, therefore, provides perspective, an angle of vision, for seeing the world. But no human being can look at everything at once. We have to focus on something that, presumably, we want to see. In this case, the focus from the perspective of the Bible is upon the challenges and problems of human relationships in the cities of America.⁸

Neither fundamentalism's simplistic literalism, nor main-line liberalism's bankrupt spiritualism will suffice at this point as a theological approach to the city. The biblical faith of our Hebrew and Christian ancestors does, however, invite us anew as modern people to struggle with urban problems. Old and new idols challenge us to examine our own stories in light of the unfolding revelation of God's story in scripture, tradition, Christ, and the Church.

The emphasis of this approach to theology is on engagement, dialogue grounded in a community of faith which lives with and for the world. Practical theology of this sort is

⁷ Lamentations 2:9 (RSV).

⁸ Donald Shriver, Jr. and Karl A. Ostrom, Is There Hope for the City? (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 12.

rooted in the life of the congregation, the base community. It seeks to reflect and act with the people of the church's fellowship, worship, and service in both its particular and general context.

Living Toward the Vision of Shalom

What is our primary calling as urban Christians and leaders of the church? Is it not that of daring to "live toward the vision of God's Shalom?"⁹ The Hebrew-Christian Bible sees the city as both a place of God's judgment and redeeming activity. It is both an exciting and scary place to live and do ministry. It has potential for both good and evil. God's Shalom is given. The Word has been made flesh in Christ, making it possible for creation and its creatures to know peace with justice. Reconciliation and hope, love amidst our brokenness, are realities for the world. Yet the Vision of God for the world, for urban and farm areas, is thwarted and blocked by individualistic tendencies to ignore the larger issues of social justice. "Now we see in a mirror dimly, know in part, but then. . . ." ¹⁰ Still the primary theological vocation of urban ministry is to proclaim in word and deed to individuals in social structures the Good News. In the words of a national Disciples Consultation on Urban Ministry in 1985:

⁹ Brueggemann, 9.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 13:12a (RSV).

Urban ministry is a witness to the fact that social action and evangelism are one. Calling individuals to salvation cannot be separated from calling our communities to justice. The whole church and those in urban ministry are called to work with and on behalf of the urban suffering and poor, internalizing the issues and doing the Good News of the Gospel.¹¹

Reflecting Upon Doing the

Word in the World

Having shared something of one minister's struggle in his denomination to communicate where our theological "home base" is, let us spell out the main tenet of this theology. More specifically, we shall look at some of the implications of this way of doing theology in terms of urban strategy and practice. William Lazareth says, "To enable responsible men to confront both life in Christ and Christ in life is the dialectical hallmark of theology."¹² Theology may take the form of God's search for man or man's search for God. One tends to abstractly focus upon heaven; the other upon "confrontation in the world."¹³

Theological Rationale

Theology's task, Bonhoeffer argued so clearly in his life and work, is to understand that God and the world are one in Christ. Furthermore, what we are talking about here

¹¹ Press Release, Urban Ministry Consultation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 1 April 1985.

¹² Jose M. Bonino, Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation, ed. William H. Lazareth (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), vii.

¹³ Ibid.

is a theology of intervention and worldly confrontation.

The writer strongly agrees with the point of view that:

In opposition to the rash of recent religious fads, the hidden Lordship of the crucified Christ still constitutes the heart of the apostolic good news. Our Christian hope lies in neither the secularization of the Church nor the sacralization of the world. Rather, the Church's worldly stance must remain in evangelical tension: strictly impartial in faith as it serves all sinful men alike in its ministry of Word and Sacrament, yet compassionately partial in love as it struggles on behalf of God's suffering "have-nots" in its ministry of mercy and justice.¹⁴

Case Study of Dialectical Practical Theology

In light of these reflections and rationale, what has been the core of this writer's theology the past ten years? How have the faithful of old First Christian Church been consulted? As stated, the author came to his present urban ministry with considerable agenda. Surely a combination of hard work, loving the people, focusing on the basics of the faith, and some creative planning would turn things around. The following case study of a church in Santa Monica, California, will set forth the story of one congregation from 1978-88, and what I have learned from the journey. It indicates the development of my theology around key questions and issues, including: interdependence, stewardship, and incarnational faith celebrated at the Lord's Table. The church as a worship-servant community will conclude this illustration of dialectical practical theology.

¹⁴ Ibid., vii-ix.

Self-Searching

First Christian Church of Santa Monica tried all kinds of things in the late 1970s to attract new families, youth, and children. It used the latest church growth methods. It advertised. It called. It sent out volumes of mail. It thought positive. The people prayed, studied and discussed the scriptures for guidance. The church, however, did not turn around. It continued to decline in attendance, giving, and other vital signs. Old First Christian was taking on water badly and some were starting to jump overboard and give up the ship. Things didn't look very hopeful with a dying congregation of mostly older people. In addition, the area where the church was located was becoming a major stopping point for countless numbers of homeless people. Families down on their luck, mentally ill street people, runaway youth, tossed-out young adults, addicts, and unemployed and under-employed came with a wide range of needs and problems. A lot of fear was generated as different kinds of people seemed to be hanging around and coming into the buildings. How could the church protect itself, its buildings, and property? There was serious discussion of selling the property and moving to a "more desirable area." People asked why the government, social agencies, somebody didn't do something with and for these people?¹⁵

¹⁵ Long-Range Planning Committee Minutes, First Christian Church, Santa Monica, CA, Fall 1979.

Reaching Beyond Ourselves

It was only as the First Christian Church began to offer food, clothing, bus tokens, and to share its facilities that something strange began to happen. For as the church dared to lend a listening ear and a helping hand to those in need, some real theology began to take place. There had been lots of Bible study before, prayer sessions, planning meetings galore to ascertain God's direction for the congregation's future. Nothing very definitive happened, though, until the church began to run some risks, to open both its doors and hearts to growing numbers of people who were coming for help. Scriptural passages which had not meant much except in general terms or overseas began to come alive and be instructive.

Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it unto me For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me.¹⁶

Love the sojourner therefore; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. God executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.¹⁷

What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the

¹⁶ Matthew 25:35, 40 (RSV).

¹⁷ Deuteronomy 10:18-19 (RSV).

body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.¹⁸

If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.¹⁹

Listening to Our Faith

The Gospel challenged us to listen to our faith rather than our fears. Could it be that the Lord was coming to us in these "foreigners," these problems, and giving us an opportunity to serve? These were God's people too and they needed a helping hand, and more! People of all ages began to share their loaves and fishes to assist the throngs coming through the church's door. Regular food collections took place and were made an integral part of worship during the offering time. Special offerings to buy food, motel vouchers, etc., were taken. Volunteers stepped forward to help an overloaded staff. The church's Thrift Shop, run by the women's group, offered clothes and household items as needed.

Cooperative Action

Along with other downtown churches, agencies, and governmental groups, community education programs were started to both raise our consciousness and that of the general public. The Westside Shelter Coalition continues

¹⁸ James 2:14-17 (RSV).

¹⁹ 1 John 4:20-21 (RSV).

to be based in the congregation some six years later dealing with poverty-homeless issues. When a local task force could not find a location for a badly needed community shelter, First Christian Church offered its basement. Those who have labored in local churches and with homeless issues in recent years can appreciate what a difficult risky step of faith this was for a church to take.

Keeping the Faith Through

Stewardship

Turning Point Shelter, now in its fifth year of operation, not only offers shelter and food, but comprehensive services with thirty five to forty homeless men and women daily. It has a broad base of religious, community, and governmental support. Turning Point staff and volunteers have also helped to start other programs throughout the Los Angeles area. Theologically, this shelter was able to open its doors and continues because a small group of Christians in First Christian Church of Santa Monica struggled with the nitty-gritty issue of Christian stewardship and building resources. "Whose buildings were these, and for what purposes ought they be used?"²⁰ It was decided initially and several times since that the buildings were God's and indeed ought to be used to serve all of God's people.

Daring to share its buildings in this way was first

²⁰ Official Board Meetings, First Christian Church, Santa Monica, CA, Spring 1983.

and foremost a theological affirmation for the church in identifying with the poor and their needs. Furthermore, working with other Christians, Jews, and humanists on the Turning Point project also brought many of us to a deeper understanding of the unity, cooperation, and synergy possible when people act together in faith to help others. Various other building sharing has been a part of the church's story of survival and service. Groups working with the elderly, the handicapped, ecumenical projects, parent-youth drug education and counseling, peace advocacy, and the poor have all been part of our building family. These community service groups have enabled the church to better maintain its facilities and to reduce building-related vandalism and crime. Secondly, some funding for other mission programs has been generated. Thirdly, First Christian Church has been able to become a badly needed community center in downtown Santa Monica in the liberating Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. A variety of study-advocacy groups have also been spawned out of these programs.

A House of Bread and Prayer

for All People

The faith of First Christian Church has both affected and been affected by these service-advocacy programs on behalf of people. Stewardship has certainly taken on a larger meaning in this context of mission concerns. The Lord's Table and the various tables which break and share

bread in our buildings have brought a deeper participation to the central event of worship. Episcopal Bishop Spong of Newark, New Jersey, puts it this way:

In the church the homeless do find shelter,
those of diverse backgrounds do discover
community, and the hungry do gather around
the altar to be fed with the bread and wine
of the Eucharist.²¹

For these and a variety of other reasons, First Christian Church of Santa Monica has increasingly become more inclusive in its membership, worship, educational, fellowship, and service life. Isaiah's admonition to be a "house of prayer for all peoples" has taken on new understanding and implications.²² Worship around the Lord's Table with diverse brothers and sisters weekly encourages this congregation to go beyond rites and rituals to the rights and needs of all God's people. In turn, the congregation's daily ministries bring it back to the Table of the Lord to be fed, guided, renewed by the Word of Judgment and Grace. The ministry of the church, both lay and ordained, has become a lot more missional and people-oriented. Yet the church's heavy social service mission orientation these past few years is driving its people more and more to their knees and to the Scriptures. New understandings of God, community, mission, and ministry are emerging which go far beyond traditional theology or social work. The church is

²¹ John Shelby Spong, "The Urban Church: Symbol and Realty," Christian Century, 12-19 Sept. 1984: 831.

²² Isaiah 56:7 (RSV).

searching anew as to the meaning of sharing the Gospel in its particular urban context. In Cox's words, it is "gathering strength for the next move."²³ It is continuing to struggle with various survival issues, although with new openness to the future and the challenges for Christians in the city.

A Theology of Reconciliation and Liberation

Dr. John Stewart once said that "pastors should teach their people to read the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other."²⁴ This emphasizes the fact that the Bible and Christology are dialectically related to daily life. As a Columbian lay theologian has said: "We have to read the Bible with the eyes of Latin America, and Latin material with the eyes of the Bible."²⁵ Liberation theology, however, is not really new, for God historically has been and is a liberating God. This may be seen in the Exodus event and later restoration of Israel. God's ongoing efforts to bring liberation are also seen in Jesus of Nazareth's concern for the poor, the outcast, the rejected, and the oppressed. Jesus' ministry, like that of the Hebrew prophets, was built upon Israel's covenant with God who

²³ Harvey Cox, Religion in the Secular City (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 194.

²⁴ John Stewart, Lecture, Old Testament Class, Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University, Ft. Worth, Fall 1961.

²⁵ Mortimer Arias and Esther Arias, The Cry of My People: Out of Captivity in Latin America (New York: Friendship, 1980), 127.

repeatedly sides with the poor. This theme of liberation is continued in the Apostle's letter to the church at Corinth, wherein God's liberation and bringing wholeness to the world is expressed. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not counting their sins against them, but entrusting to us the ministry of reconciliation."²⁶

An Incarnational Faith for

Both the City and the Farm

This is the basis of a faith for both the city and the farm. The historical split between rural and urban life was earlier referred to in this chapter, and on many levels the farm and city are radically different. Recent farm foreclosures and economic problems, however, would indicate that farmers and urban poor have a great deal more in common than previously thought. Relatives of the writer operate a dairy-poultry farm in southwest Missouri and have for years been staunch Republicans. Recently, however, they created considerable family furor by supporting Democratic candidates. As they explained it, they simply felt abandoned, exploited, and without an advocate for small farmers like themselves. Urban dwellers, particularly the poor and minorities, have long had this feeling in our major cities. Reverend Jessie Jackson with his Rainbow Coalition is seeking to forge a link between those left out of power, cast aside, without representation.

²⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:19 (RSV).

It is a battle and cause, however, that goes far beyond politics. For the theology of reconciliation and liberation set forth in this paper is one which would instruct us toward a deep sense of oneness with all of humanity. It is a faith which would challenge the church to identify with the poor, the suffering, the oppressed. It is a theology which would affirm the God of Jesus Christ to be at the center of all life. Yet urban Christians particularly recognize that the Creator-Sustainer-Redeemer God of all peoples is not to be confined to any of our categories, channels, or conceptions. Most importantly, however, Bonhoeffer reminds us in quoting Martin Luther King: "It is one thing if God is there, and another if God is there for you."²⁷ Matthew's Gospel proclaims the Good News for all the world, "Emmanuel, God is with us!"²⁸ Bonhoeffer adds, God is with us through the living Word, the Sacraments, and the Community of Faith. But God is not with us Christians in an exclusive superior manner. Rather God is with us calling us to participate in the suffering of God.²⁹ God is not with us taking away our humanity into some kind of sterile holiness, but as a man for others in Christ calling us to discipleship.

²⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center (New York: Harper, 1960), 48.

²⁸ Matthew 1:23 (RSV).

²⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (London: Collins (1953), 122.

Man is challenged to participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world. . . . To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, but to be a man, to participate in the suffering of God in the life of the world.³⁰

This obviously has deep implications for the urban church confronted with so much human need. For are we not called and driven out of ourselves into incarnational theology and ministry?

Good News of God's

Judgment and Grace

The call to discipleship in Christ, as Bonhoeffer found to be true in his own life, is not one of separation from life. It is not one of separation from joy and sorrows, idolatries and covenants. But through the Word, the Sacraments, and the Church, the Christian knows the Good News of both judgment and grace. Christ calls us to find ourselves through daring "to die and lose self in service."³¹ In the words of Scripture: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."³² We are individually and corporately to share the Word of judgment and grace in the world with the secular age. We are to do so not with self-righteousness but with the deep joy and happiness, the peace of God that

³⁰ Ibid., 123.

³¹ Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, 36.

³² Romans 12:2 (RSV).

passes all understanding. Like Bonhoeffer, our personal and larger world may be collapsing, not going well, but it is in the midst of life that we too are called to affirm the Eternal Incarnate Crucified-Risen Lord.

Our primary vocation in the city is simply to be the church, a community of self-conscious Christians. The church is a presence, an outpost of the Kingdom of God, a light in the darkness which the darkness can never extinguish or overwhelm. Our vocation is to be ourselves. Someday Christians of the suburbs, the towns, and the hamlets will recognize that this witness is deeply important to them. Then perhaps the whole church will place its resources where the need is, not because we are generous but because our integrity as the people of God requires it.³³

There are many kinds of strategies and ways of practicing ministry in the city. We shall look specifically, the next two chapters, at some of these in comparison with the writer's crisis intervention style. What has worked, proven helpful in Santa Monica, California, may or may not work in your own context. Make no mistake about it, though, we are all called to be faithful in our witness and presence for the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is a radical witness to which we are called, for the hopes and dreams of urbanization, modernity, and their sisters have not brought us a better life. Indeed, they have brought us to the very brink of disaster. Liberal theology has been found lacking in both its analysis and prescription of modern humankind. Religious fundamentalism

³³ Spong, 830.

and fanaticism will fall short, especially in a day and age of pluralism. Hopeful voices are being raised from Third World Catholic-related base communities. The poor, both in the United States and around the world, grow in numbers and noise. Each of us must start from our own roots, biases, and the faith of our ancestors. Yet we must dare to be open to the Spirit of God that is already working to bring liberation to the bottom and edges of life peoples.³⁴

Saint Benedict left the city in the sixth century to take refuge in the mountains. He did so to seek a more favorable environment to "seek God and live the Gospel."³⁵ A new community of brothers was formed which lived simply and humbly. Were Saint Benedict alive today, he might well go and live among the poor "in search of the right place to reread the Gospel."³⁶

Summary Statement of
Liberation Theology

Like Saint Benedict, we also are called and challenged to reread the Gospel. Seeking God and living out the Gospel is not easy in our day and age either. This chapter on theology of urban ministry has sought to give some guidance to those who would journey in faith in the city. Clearly we as urban Christians are called to go beyond the

³⁴ Cox, 21.

³⁵ Ibid., 205.

³⁶ Ibid.

individualism of our culture, religious history, and sectarian theology. Today's urban environment and world needs a theology that is essentially biblical, Christocentric, pragmatic, and yet comprehensive in its concern for all peoples and structures. Such a practical liberation theology, it has been suggested, is rooted in God's historical covenant of creation, redemption, judgment, and grace.

The Good News was, is, and ever shall be, "God was in Christ reconciling . . . not counting our sins or those of the world against us, but entrusting to us the ministry of reconciliation."³⁷ This liberating Good News changes both persons and social structures, but it must be brought into dialogue with the agendas of people and social systems. Latin American theologians have sought to restore this central theme of God's liberating activity, daring to assert that God has a preference for the poor and oppressed. They are not the first to do so, however, for such was the thrust of Jesus of Nazareth's ministry. The bold Galilean identified with the poor, and saw them as especially open to the message of the Kingdom.

Liberation theology, as viewed in this context, is deeply incarnational in nature. To be a Christian is to participate in the joy and suffering of God and all of God's peoples. God's world and people are one, yet many.

³⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:19 (RSV).

The essential task of the Christian congregation, base community, is to symbolize in word and deed the Good News, and be about God's business of liberation. Let us do so with courage, creativity, humor, and humanness, knowing that both we and the systems of the world are broken and in need of God's saving Word in Christ.

CHAPTER 3

Developing a Strategy of Urban Ministry

An Overview of the Task

If one expects to survive in the wilderness, surrounded by a largely indifferent or hostile environment, the development of a plan of action is essential. So it is for the urban pastor and church. A comprehensive rationale of one's situation is important, as is a vision of where one wants to go. The world and the urban context has its agendas. Therefore, it behooves the church, which is subject to many forces and influences, to be clear of God's agenda. This calls for much prayer, Bible study, and disciplined intentional planning. Urban churches simply do not survive, and do not engage in serious mission without both long- and short-range strategies to implement their divine calling.

Furthermore, urban churches that expect to have a bright future (or any at all) as well as a glowing past, must be able to make the shift from rural village life to the modern scene. This in general involves not only a tremendous mental shift of thinking and attitude, but daring to dream of and implement larger strategies of ecumenism and new networking systems. It involves the development of strategies that recognize the effects of single encounter events in our lives. Recognition of the

growing power of the media, and the church's need to more creatively see brief contacts with people as a means of ministry, is also essential.

Urban areas have experienced major breakdowns of community, people expendable policies and practices, and lost priorities. This chapter will explore a concept of ministry which strategizes not what the clergy can do for the church but the church's servanthood within the described world of the city. For urban church strategy is first and foremost, not a program but a living out of God's love for the world, God's reconciling action in Christ, the Divine imperative which will not let us go!

A Global Vision with a Local Strategy

Such theology calls for global vision and strategy, yet has a very particular focus. It envisions an interdependent ecumenical strategy of implementing the Gospel in urban society. But such strategy is always rooted in the local congregation seeking to survive, to be the church in the city. Survival for the urban church can easily deteriorate into just paying the bills and keeping the doors open. Internal and social forces sometimes leads to loss of dreams and ministry. A new definition of survival that enriches our life together as a community of faith, hope, and love in Christ is proposed. A new and larger understanding of survival is suggested which compels us as the Body of Christ to go out and "make glad the city of God."¹

¹ Psalms 46:4a (RSV).

Two examples of faith in action on the current scene are World Vision and Habitat for Humanity. Other examples from church history, past and present, could be cited. There are a wide variety of approaches to the Bible and theology, which share World Vision's strategy of "getting people out of the pews and out into the world."² This evangelical Christian program is borrowing heavily upon its world relief experience overseas in an effort to develop a new cross-cultural thrust in many United States cities. Local church projects are emerging. Suburban Christians are encouraged to venture across traditional cultural lines by visiting inner city drug, feeding, and shelter projects. The intent of this consciousness raising is to mobilize churches to mission by providing opportunities to serve, learn, and grow together in Jesus Christ. Teams of adults are enabled to join in partnership with adults from other churches, projects, and cultures.

Habitat for Humanity is another example of Christian theology and strategy in action. Building low-cost housing in partnership with the poor in many major cities around the world has been this group's unique witness. It is a witness that Mayor Andrew Young of Atlanta, and former President and Mrs. Jimmie Carter, have become involved in and helped move forward. It is a strategy that grew out of Disciples of Christ Millard Fuller's missionary efforts in

² Randy Miller, "Out of the Pews and Into the World," World Vision Magazine 31, no. 5 (Oct.-Nov. 1987): 8.

Africa a number of years ago. Without safe and adequate housing, Fuller concluded, people have little dignity or hope for the future. When given the opportunity to help build their own houses, much more than just a structure is built. This approach has also helped a number of churches in many different denominations to help in their local communities with badly needed low-cost housing projects.³

Toyohiko Kagawa provides still another example of strategic faith in action, of global vision particularized. Born late in the nineteenth century at Knobe, Japan, amidst traditional Buddhist and Confucian culture, Kagawa was attracted to the compassionate Jesus Christ. Disowned by his family, Kagawa went to seminary with the help of a Presbyterian missionary. While a good student, Kagawa was drawn toward translating his faith into action. He visited and later lived in the slums of Shinkawa. There he preached and taught, but also shared food, medicines, and worked with the people. Treating the symptoms of slum life was not enough for Kagawa. Kagawa abhorred the gap between what the church in Japan was and should be. Christianity, as Kagawa put it, "is a religion of men gone mad with the love of God and man."⁴ It is a movement of love practiced and made a reality in life. It is to take up your cross as

³ Millard Fuller, "Habitat World," Habitat Monthly Journal, Dec. 1987: 2.

⁴ William Axling, Kagawa (New York: Harper & Bros., 1932), 30.

Christ did his. Or as expressed in one of his meditations:

Christianity is not talk, it is action; it is not words, it is power. Christ's love movement is summed up in the cross. The cross is the whole of Christ, the whole of love. God speaks to man thru the cross, of Love's mysteries concealed in the Divine Bosom.⁵

It was this kind of faith, along with Kagawa's deep identification with the poor, that led him from Christian social services to social reform, politics, and strategies of social advocacy. Few pastors and congregations begin to approach Kagawa's sense of spirituality and dedication. Yet Kagawa has provided an important source of inspiration and practical strategy for this writer and his congregation. Human needs, both within the congregation and the surrounding urban environment, have challenged our theology and somewhat individualistic ways of doing things. Did we really believe what we said, confessed? And what was our strategy to respond if we did? How could we at the local level of the church translate our larger vision and faith into strategies of action on behalf of and with others?

The Santa Monica Challenge and a Strategy to Fit

Challenges and problems of human relationships in the city of Santa Monica have made this writer and his congregation much more aware of our interdependency with other religious groups. In addition, ties with social agencies, cities, states, and even nations have been acknowledged.

⁵ Toyohiko Kagawa, Meditations on the Cross (Chicago: Willet, Clark & Co., 1935), 6.

In particular, the writer experienced this to be true while chairing the Citizens' Committee on the Homeless from January through May 1985. Appointed by the City Manager on behalf of the Council, the committee was authorized to hold hearings, study, and discuss the issues. The hope was to come up with recommendations which would potentially lessen some of the tension developing within our jurisdiction. It quickly became apparent to a broad cross-section of citizens in the working group that Santa Monica's homeless problem extended far beyond our city limits. We as a community could take certain specific actions in responding to growing human needs, citizen complaints and fears. However, many dimensions of the homeless problem would require action on the part of city, county, state, and federal governments working together. This would require creative cooperation with various private, religious, and business groups. This offered no excuse for inaction on our part as city, local church, private citizens, or as religious people. But it made us all aware of our interdependency. Individual and corporate actions were needed.

Congregationally, we found these same things to be true in 1980-85, as emergency needs for food, clothing, shelter, jobs, and medical care escalated beyond our need to respond. As touched upon in the earlier case study, food and shelter coalitions, networks were formed as the community sought a strategy of response to massive human needs. Clearly the urban church is called to give a

helping hand, a cup of water to the needy, and to "see in the least of these the Christ."⁶ We have a biblical mandate to love the world as God in Christ did, and to help humanize efforts to serve the poor. In the process we often find the "dry bones of the church" coming alive.⁷ Larger systems of providing social services, advocacy, and political change are needed. The urban church, if it is to be relevant, can and ought encourage networking around a variety of social justice issues. The church can play a role in larger systems of government, private enterprise, and citizen groups getting involved in helping to humanize society. The urban church may also be humanized by the city!

General, Regional, and Local
Disciple Strategies

The Metro Parish

In order to fully exercise its power and strength, to see its opportunities and responsibilities, however, the urban local church must further develop its strategy of seeking support, peers, and partners in mission. For the problems, challenges, and needs are simply too great and overwhelming. It was this personal-professional-congregational need which led to the revitalization of our old Disciples of Christ District II. Several clergy from inner city and downtown-type churches responded to

⁶ Matthew 25:31-46 Paraphrase (RSV).

⁷ Ezekiel 37:1-14 Paraphrase (RSV).

the invitation to come together monthly for mutual support, fellowship, and brainstorming. It was the beginning of an important bottom-up movement within our Pacific Southwest Region of urban Disciples. Out of this movement came a covenant forming the Metro Disciples Clergy Group and Parish in May, Pentecost Sunday, 1985. A copy of this covenant is enclosed at the end of this project paper. The Metro Group's ongoing goals ranging from intentional peer support of one another, professional networking, to congregational sharing and advocacy within the larger church's structures, are described.

Urban strategizing for both the writer's congregation in Santa Monica and the Metro Group collectively has led to a reexamination of denominational structures, priorities, and decision-making processes. For example, the Metro Parish Group has called upon our Pacific Southwest Regional Christian Church structures to be accountable in terms of urban ministry. Multi-cultural ethnic concerns, long-range planning, and new staffing priorities have been raised. The group has played a facilitating role in challenging and helping General structures of the Disciples of Christ to renew its urban ministry priority. Representatives have been sent to several national gatherings, and in August of 1987 the Disciples Urban Ministry Team met for the first time in Los Angeles, with strong representation from the Metro Parish Group. These consultations have brought into clearer focus that much more is being said than done in the

urban ministry area. For, not only among Disciples but other mainline denominations as well, theology, strategy, and practice of urban ministry have been hit and miss at best.

Various attempts over the years have been made toward urban renewal both inside and outside the church, providing a variety of urban strategies. As a Disciple the writer can best speak of and critique the strategy of his own denomination. Non-Disciples can substitute their own denomination at this point. This history and development must be taken seriously by any urban pastor or congregation who would hope to work productively in the city. For without such roots and perspective, one's efforts are at the mercy of various currents.

History and Development of

Disciples' Urban Policy

The Disciples of Christ's most intentional program and strategy of urban ministry has been the Reconciliation effort. Initially, an emergency response to the Watts riots and crises in our cities of 1967, the Reconciliation Program has become institutionalized throughout the church's life. Contributions to this important program for alleviating poverty, racism, oppression, and hunger in North America have grown from \$15,000 in 1968 to well over \$500,000 annually. Mandated by both the Gospel and massive human need, the Disciples Reconciliation program provides leaven in the whole church for urban concerns and issues,

inviting all to become "Partners in Liberation."⁸ First Christian Church of Santa Monica over the past four years has been a recipient of Reconciliation funds. These funds have helped with ministries for homeless street people. The church has also been a supporter of this program, educationally and financially.

Various other programs, departments, and leaders of the church at different manifestations have from time to time given emphasis to urban ministry related to senior citizens, children, unwed mothers, housing, and so forth. Creative leadership has come from the National Benevolent Association, Church and Society Dept. of the Division of Homeland Ministries. Such leadership has also come from a few Regional and Area ministries that have had part-time or full-time staff people assigned to urban concerns. Lou Knowles, Dennis Short, and Jane Hopkins have been helpful catalysts in our Pacific Southwest Region. However, they were spread too thin to have been as effective as they might have been.

Urban projects, particularly Reconciliation-related, have often in the past not been closely tied in to local congregation or clusters of congregations. As a result, such projects have sometimes lacked accountability. Isolated urban congregations have often sought to respond

⁸ John R. Foulkes, "Partners in Liberation," Minister's Bulletin, Aug.-Sept. 1986: 1.

to human needs, changing neighborhoods around them, developing a variety of strategies and models of ministries. Other local congregations, however, have been fearful of the changes about them, and either pulled out or gone inward. These have been and in many cases continue to be some of the problems facing Disciple urban congregations and planners.

Emerging Directions and

Priorities for Disciples

What can be done? The verdict is still out; however, recent Disciple of Christ consultations call for renewed focus and priority in urban ministry. Several top leaders of the church, including Dr. John Compton of the Division of Homeland Ministries, have bluntly admitted failure and drift in this important area of church life and mission. Urban ministry and revitalization of inner city life has simply not been a major priority of the church for most of the last twenty years.⁹ Dr. Compton, a black Disciple church executive, further comments on the challenge that is ahead for the church:

The enthusiastic support of the whole church is crucial to the success of any urban strategy. The denomination has lost sight of the value of ministry to people in the inner city, especially the poor, the oppressed, the powerless, ethnic groups, and the disposed. We confess that we, as a church, have failed to heed our Lord's call

⁹ Press Releases, Urban Ministry Consultations of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Chicago, 1985, and Los Angeles, 1987.

to love all people and to join as peers and partners with the poor and oppressed of God's family.¹⁰

Honest confession is a good place to start if we are to get beyond denominational casting of crumbs to our urban congregations and decaying inner cities. Rhetoric is often loud and extreme as to what needs to be done, ranging from massive expenditures of funds to asking the suburbs to subsidize the cities. But there is little chance of the world, governments, or social agencies doing so unless the church leads the way. In the words of Rev. Donna Schafer of Chicago Urban Academy:

Urban ministry is ministry to the whole world, not just to our people. The Gospel really means it when it says it is better to give than to receive. The church has a tremendous opportunity to give meaning to the lives of people.¹¹

A growing number of General, Regional, and Congregational leaders among the Disciples of Christ are coming to the following concensus related to urban ministry policy and strategy:

1. Urban policy should be wholistic and intentional, recognizing the spiritual, economic, political, and social aspects of persons and communities in the city.
2. Urban ministry must orient around a partnership with the poor and oppressed of our cities.

¹⁰ John Compton, "Disciples Urban Consultation" (Indianapolis: Office of Communication, Summer 1985), 1.

¹¹ Ibid., 2.

3. The church has a biblical mandate to "seek the welfare of the city."¹²

4. The development of congregational models are needed to share information, stories of success and failure. They are also needed to support one another, to raise dollars, and to set examples for the denomination, ecumenical church, nation, and world.

5. While much work remains to be done on the urban scene, it is time for the urban local church to "be a headlight instead of a taillight in society."¹³ Moral-prophetic leadership and creative courageous examples are sorely needed. The central importance of the local congregation as the primary place of worship, nurture, witness, and service is emerging. Indeed, the urban church is in a unique position to call the whole church to faithfulness in its God-given life and mission.

Alternative Models of Urban Strategy
(Local, Denominational, and Ecumenical)

Just as no local church can meaningfully theologize, strategize, or practice urban ministry by itself, neither can any denomination. A variety of other denominational models and strategies are emerging, along with para-church programs and ecumenical approaches. Two of these have been previously mentioned in the chapter, World Vision and

¹² Jeremiah 29:7 (RSV).

¹³ Martin Luther King, Jr., Sermon, General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Dallas, Oct. 1966.

Habitat for Humanity. Chapman College, a Disciples of Christ-related college at Orange, California, has developed a program called *The World at Our Doorstep*. The leader, Dr. Dennis Savage, has drawn heavily from Presbyterian demographic information. The program seeks to encourage creative incorporation of and ministry with the growing numbers of new immigrants to Southern California. It also provides a helpful strategy and practical tools for preparing local congregations to recognize and get ready for a new kind of society.¹⁴

Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene and the Bresee Foundation provides yet another alternative strategy to urban ministry. It proceeds from a very traditional base of Christian community, worship, education, and service. The Nazarenes have learned to take their territory seriously. However, they have done their demographic homework and responded to the changing neighborhood around them. What are the assets and liabilities of the area around your church? Who lives there? What are their needs? Accordingly, First Nazarene of Los Angeles has Spanish, Korean, Filipino, and English-speaking groups all in one congregation. Both laypeople and clergy are trained in the ABCs of doing cross-cultural ministry. First Nazarene's success in urban ministry would seem to be a combination of their strong sense of spirituality and

¹⁴ Dennis Savage, *The World on Our Doorstep* (Orange, CA: Chapman College, 1985-86), Video & Study Guide.

building programs around specific human needs. Dr. Fletcher Tink, now ministering with a Nazarene congregation in Alhambra, has been a key leader in the development of this particular strategy.¹⁵ He speaks of the urban challenge:

The challenges of a city may include differing language-based or cultural groups, transiency, high crime, high unemployment and poverty rates, inaccessibility of health care, and lack of shelter, food, and clothing for many city residents. The city hosts a concentration of the elderly, of youth, of single adults, of non-traditional families, and a spectrum of religious ideas and spiritual attitudes. How does the Church, a minister, or any Christian reach out to people facing one or many of these conditions?¹⁶

Mid-Wilshire Parish, consisting of fourteen Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish congregations, is another model of urban ministry seeking to respond to peoples' needs in the city. It has centered around inter-faith dialogue, shared worship experiences, and cooperative food-shelter-emergency services. Mid-Wilshire Parish is primarily a strategy for mainline liberal religious groups who share the Wilshire corridor toward downtown Los Angeles. As one layperson involved put it, "We are in the people recycling business."¹⁷

¹⁵ Fletcher Tink, "Urban Field Trip: First Nazarene Church of Los Angeles," Address, Foundations for Urban Ministry Class, School of Theology at Claremont, Jan. 1986.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ James Pierson, "Wilshire Group Typifies Effort to Help the Needy," Los Angeles Herald Examiner, March [Lent] 1987, Religious Section.

Still another model and important strategy of urban ministry is the ecumenical approach of The Urban Ministries Study Center associated with the School of Theology at Claremont. This program was made possible through a major gift from the sale of old First Methodist Church of Los Angeles. The primary focus of this program is educational in nature. Ministers, theological faculty, and graduate students are given both academic and contextual training in urban culture and ministry. It is solidly based in the Methodist Church. Yet the strategy of training, internships, and resourcing of urban ministries are thoroughly ecumenical.¹⁸ First Christian Church of Santa Monica has had three different urban interns over the past four years through the School of Theology and its Urban Ministries Study Center. This has helped provide additional staff for the church and its varied social ministries. It has also provided important hand-on practical training in ministry within the urban context. Matching financial grants up to \$2,000 per internship have proven extremely helpful and beneficial in selling this urban program to lay leaders of the congregation.

Crucial Issues for Urban Ministries

Various Protestant denominations have their own strategies of urban ministry. Robert Wilson, an urban

¹⁸ Cornish Rogers, Urban Ministries Brochure, Urban Ministries Study Center, School of Theology at Claremont, Spring 1987.

researcher, zeroes in on the crucial issues all Christians face in doing ministry in the city.

Does the city church of today need a different definition of success? Can it be measured by equating figures of membership under yesterday's conditions without regard for the circumstances of today? A church should expect to be weighed by the measure of its opportunity and the degree of its labor to make the Gospel relevant to the needs of the people.¹⁹

Dr. Wes Balda, an urban strategist, continues the dialogue over the challenge of urban ministry and the critical issues faced in developing a comprehensive strategy for such work.

Urban ministry is now the business of nearly every church in America and in most industrial and industrializing countries in the world. This country is over three-fourths urban. Ethnic America is even more so urban. Cities present us with the most complex opportunity for ministry in the history of the church. Our rural forebears discarded the parish as a culturally and politically inappropriate model. Instead they built churches on a rural model and rarely understood how cities work. . . . Biblically, theologically, and historically, though, we have the bases for the unique authority of the church to be exercised in the city.²⁰

"But is it possible to build a city where God is worshipped truly and where citizens deal with one another justly and mercifully?"²¹ Is it possible for the church

¹⁹ Robert L. Wilson, Questions City Churches Must Answer (Philadelphia: United Methodist Church, 1962), 5.

²⁰ W. D. Balda, Course Outline: Introduction, Foundations for Urban Ministry Class, School of Theology at Claremont, 7-18 Jan. 1985.

²¹ Shriver and Ostrom, 58.

to make its unique witness to Christ, yet be a unifying force amidst the diversity and brokenness of the city? The somewhat idealistically framed question by Shriver, nevertheless, does not diminish the reality that the urban challenge offers the church a tremendous opportunity for ministry. It is not the world of yesterday, however, but increasingly a pluralistic society that will require the very best of us and our institutions. Bishop John Shelby Spong of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, New Jersey, states the situation thusly:

There is a powerful political dimension to the present reality of our cities. The demise of so many of them has not been the result of an accident or of some inexorable force of history, but has come about because of consciously made political decisions. . . . Super highways built with public money allowed suburban commuters to put larger and larger distances between themselves and the stresses of city life. As a result, the core cities were slowly reduced to near-bankruptcy, becoming communities of the poor, of the elderly and of ethnic minorities at the bottom of the socioeconomic system. They became dwelling places for those requiring the greatest number of social services, just as the necessary tax base for those services eroded--the taxpayers having fled to suburbia, where they could pretend that the pain of the city was neither their pain nor their fault.²²

Genuine evangelism is the witness that shares the pain of the city, the separation of the suburbs, and the powerlessness of the farmers. The Word must become flesh again and again not only in concern for individual persons but for persons in their total social context. The power, the

²² Spong, 828.

unity, the salvation of Christ is made manifest in the witness in which social action and evangelism are one.

The Los Angeles Context

Some urban planners from UCLA speak of how the Los Angeles urban region over the past twenty years

has experienced a peculiarly intense and comprehensive process of restructuring. Significant continuities with the past remain, but they persist with a dramatically transformed urban geographic landscape.²³

Since this landscape will have much to say and do about the future shape of strategy for urban ministry, the writer mentions them in some detail. Examples of this changing urban landscape include but are not limited to:

1. The development of the Los Angeles area into the world's largest technical center,
2. The expansion of Los Angeles into the financial hub of Western United States and the Pacific Rim, and
3. The growth of manufacturing, international exports, and a strong reliance upon government and defense related to contracts.

At the same time of these economic changes, there have been far-reaching industrial declines, spreading bankrupt urban neighborhoods. Two million immigrants plus over the past twenty years have greatly expanded low-wage technology and manufacturing, and service-related employment. East

²³ Edward Soja, Allan Heskin and Marco Cenzatti, Los Angeles: Through the Kaleidoscope of Urban Restructuring (Los Angeles: UCLA, Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning, 1985), 1.

Los Angeles has become the largest barrio outside Mexico City. Large numbers of Filipinos, Thais, Vietnamese, Iranians, Armenians, Guatemalans, Colombians, and Cubans have made Los Angeles their home since 1970, plus even larger numbers of Koreans and Salvadoreans in recent years. A deepening housing crisis grows both in depth and breadth, with fewer and fewer low-cost housing units to be found, and Los Angeles is characterized as the Homeless Capitol of the United States. Increasing poverty, unemployment, and renewed residential segregation persist. Extraordinary high rates of crime and drug use, and the largest prison population in the country, are all a part of the paradoxical patterns which come together in the Los Angeles region.²⁴

Beyond Analysis to Ministry

This is the context which impacts First Christian Church of Santa Monica and those of many dominations in Southern California. The various strategies which would hope to penetrate and influence this environment must be rooted in a deep sense of spirituality and cultural awareness. Urban churches in particular must have a clear sense of identity. They must know their life and mission, what it is, their priorities. Is it not still, as Niebuhr stated years ago, "to bring about an increase in the love

²⁴ Ibid., 1, 2, 5.

²⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr, The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 39.

of God and neighbor?"²⁵ Granted this is difficult to interpret, strategize, and to practice amidst massive social changes, overwhelming human need. The writer has found, however, that it is possible to move beyond the victim position. It is possible to move beyond just reacting to things happening to you. It is dependent upon God's Grace giving us hope, even when our personal-collective efforts seem frail in the face of the dragons of the world. Hough puts it succinctly:

There is no assurance that the future holds anything more or less than destruction and death. Life presents us with possibilities for good, but the meaning and ultimate outcome of it all is dreadfully uncertain. There can be no sustained optimism about the human prospect, the city, secular humanistic faith, or in the self-righteous moralism of individualistic and parochial faith. It is our lot to continue an active Christian presence in the world, one which expands its conception of moral responsibility to the common good of the whole creation.²⁶

A Strategy of Presence

"A strategy of presence" appears on the surface to be pessimistic. It may seem cynical in that it sees little hope of the church saving the city. Little stock is given to schemes of renewal for bringing in the Kingdom. Yet a strategy of presence is always hopeful, for it is rooted in the community of faith having experienced the redemptive power of God's Presence. Christians, the urban church, are

²⁶ Joseph C. Hough, Jr., "The Loss of Optimism as a Problem for Liberal Christian Faith," Theology of Ministry Class, School of Theology at Claremont, Summer 1986.

able to be "present" in the city--because God's Presence has been revealed in the life-death-resurrection of Jesus Christ in the world. Our hope, therefore, is not in some kind of idealistic man-made salvation, vision, or dream of planned inevitable progress. All of our plans, dreams, and strategies are human, fallible, subject to change and corruption. There is no one way or ultimate strategy of fulfilling God's Vision for the city. In the words of Hoekendijk, "The primary thing that is asked of us is presence, to be there serving without ulterior motives, and for the time being probably also without too many words."²⁷

Seeking the Welfare of

the City

Paul found in Ephesus and other cities that

we cannot preach and teach Christ with any authenticity without also confronting the social and economic problems that debilitate people in our cities. Paul did both in Ephesus. We can do no less where we live.²⁸

In the words of Jeremiah, the Word of the Lord is, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."²⁹ Urban churches and our cities are in trouble, but God has not abandoned the city. The

²⁷ T. C. Hoekendijk, The Church Inside Out (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 124.

²⁸ Lloyd Ogilvie, Acts, vol. 5 of The Communicator's Commentary (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 275.

²⁹ Jeremiah 29:7 (RSV).

city is still a place where God acts to bring justice and redemption. It is a place of both promise and hope, as well as hopelessness, injustice, and suffering. As pointed out in Chapter 2, the church as God's people has a theological calling, a biblical mandate, and a human challenge to join in partnership with the poor and oppressed in our cities. Indeed, we meet Jesus Christ in the secular environment of our urban areas. Jesus Christ came, and still comes, not to condemn the world, but that the world may know the life-the power-the peace of God.³⁰ This is our strategic witness in the city. Yet, because God has affirmed our humanity in Christ, we are open to and also transformed by the humanity of the city. It is our opportunity and task, as Shriver expresses it, to be deeply personal, interpersonal, and public in our Christian witness.

The cities of America contain a complex array of possibilities and frustrations for any vision of change in the way those cities benefit and harm their citizens. To touch the human problems of those cities is to touch systems as large as multinational corporations, as intimate as neighborhoods, as complex as the three levels of American government, and as global as the economic interchanges of the cities of the whole earth. But no city-dweller, and no Christian, can act wisely and courageously in relation to any of these formidable systems without the fortifying combination of faith, companionships, and growing acquaintance with neighbors in the process of relating to them politically. This is the most fundamental challenge facing the churches in urban America today. It is the challenge of

³⁰ John 3:16 Paraphrase (RSV).

equipping their members for faithful participation in the politics of change towards a society that is truly free, just, and inclusive.³¹

The strategy herein described and recommended for the urban church of these last years of the twentieth century is one which:

1. Seeks to take responsibility for its future and not just react,
2. Is a strategy that is ever-unfolding, changing, in dialogue with its roots and needs of people in the city, the world,
3. Is a dialectical strategy that is theological as well, and
4. Is a strategy that also calls for a variety of skills, tools, and methods of ministry--these include preaching, teaching, counseling, and administration.

Chapter 4 will deal with the implementation of this dialectical theology-strategy of urban ministry. Crisis intervention theory and models from the community mental health field will be utilized as one means of "Living Toward the Vision of God's Shalom" for the city.³²

³¹ Donald Shriver, Jr., Keynote Address.

³² Brueggemann, 10.

CHAPTER 4

The Practice of Urban Ministry

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen. 1:1)

"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." (2 Cor. 5:18a)

"But God showed his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him." (1 John 4:8b)

Divine Intervention

Theologically, strategically, and in practice, the Good News is that God has made the first move. God has intervened on our behalf and that of the world! In our search for God, we find that God the Creator-Sustainer-Redeemer has been taking the initiative all along life's journey. Jesus of Nazareth illustrated and modeled God's first intervention in the lives of people time and time again. He had compassion upon the poor; healed the sick; released those in bondage. James and John, Peter and Andrew, heard and saw and responded to Jesus' intervention in their lives. Matthew speaks of a paralytic with whom Jesus intervened, forgiving the man's sins and challenging him to, "Rise, take up your bed and go home."¹ Jesus also intervened to help

¹ Matthew 9:6 (RSV).

Mary Magdelene, a woman possessed, to find wholeness. Luke records a brief encounter between Jesus and a blind man near Jericho, on the road to Jerusalem. Jesus was passing by and the man cried out in need, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"² And Jesus stopped and intervened. The list could go on and on telling of Jesus and his disciples' many and varied interventions with people in crisis.

Several years ago Norman Cousins visited Albert Schweitzer at his medical mission compound in Africa. The two men spoke of great international problems and social issues. In fact, one of Cousins' reasons for going to visit was his hope of getting the great doctor to release some papers and to make a statement about nuclear testing. After being interrupted a few times by a nurse needing instructions to care for a patient, Schweitzer turned to Cousins and said, "In a world of great social issues, it is well to remember that individuals still have problems."³ It is important for the urban church and its leadership to look and deal with the various currents which beat against its shores and affect its people. Yet it must never forget that people are what matter most.

The Church of Jesus Christ has a central calling,

² Luke 18:35-43 Paraphrase (RSV).

³ Charles F. Kemp, The Caring Pastor (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 9.

tradition, and challenge to meet people where they are in both their personal and social needs. Indeed, "a Christian has been defined as one who can read statistics with compassion."⁴ And God knows we have statistics enough!

There are statistics about marriage and divorce, statistics about poverty and unemployment, statistics about mental illness and mental retardation, statistics about crime and delinquency, statistics about battered wives and abused children--the list goes on and on.⁵

Statistics, of course, only tell a small part of the whole story when you consider the families, employers, employees, and many others who are affected by these people's pain and problems.

The failure of much urban theology and strategy, however, is that it often fails to get beyond the study and discuss phase. Meanwhile, the church in general and the urban church in particular is daily challenged to intervene in the lives of people. Is there a Word from the Lord? Does the man for others from Galilee, and those who speak in his Name, really have anything to offer? As mentioned in earlier chapters, many kinds of people come for help. Others languish in the background, with little hope for tomorrow. They are rich and poor, black and white, brown and yellow, humble and arrogant, young and old. But they are all people, God's children: in need, searching, yet guarded.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 9-10.

Challenged to Practice What We Preach

More than any other institution in our society the church has a history of caring and sharing with people in need. The Disciples of Christ, as elaborated upon earlier, have done so primarily through the varied ministries and structures of its National Benevolent Association. Each of us individually and as congregations are indebted to a long line of persons who have intervened on our behalf. Pastoral care and counseling enables people to join in liberating themselves and in helping others. Powerful models have influenced each of us in every area of our lives, both positively and negatively. Even so, urban churches and denominations have taken their cues from a wide variety of disciplines, examples, and ways of doing ministry.

Without question, the dynamics and diversity of city ministries call for a great deal of flexibility and creativity in an ever-increasing pluralistic society. Different styles and varied methods are called for in terms of practice and place. One's emphasis may be on personal pastoral ministry, social services, or political-social action related to power structures. There are various examples of these different forms of ministry among Santa Monica downtown churches. Some specialize in ministries with the elderly. One Episcopal church nearby has been a compassionate refuge and advocate for homosexuals. Still another has been active among the wealthy power-structure people on the westside. Another has practiced a ministry

of community organization and advocacy, with its pastor presently serving as Santa Monica's Mayor. Without a doubt, basic skills of preaching, teaching, counseling, and church administration are still very crucial to the urban congregation.

This is to say emphatically that the urban church is uniquely on the front lines. It is in a position to make a difference for Christ through communicating disciplined caring, intentional-organized love of God and neighbor. In the midst of a society that is becoming more mechanically and technically oriented, the Gospel asserts that people matter the most. People have more value and dignity than things. In a culture of rampant loneliness and playing it safe, the Good News challenges the urban church to practice running risks for people. The urban church simply cannot be neutral in the face of devastating personal and social problems.

But how can the local urban church implement this challenge to practice what it preaches? Or, as Howard Clinebell puts it, "How can the church make the maximum contribution to the spiritual health and growth of persons, society as a whole?"⁶ The church is not a social agency, political party, or economic system, yet it is called to witness in every arena of life. The church is called to practice caring concern for individuals and families.

⁶ Howard Clinebell, Mental Health Through Christian Community (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965), 15.

It is also called, the author believes, to transform, critique, and support social structures. For example, in First Christian Church of Santa Monica, this has involved the practice of solid pastoral care, a strong worship service and educational program. It has also involved developing new ways of using our buildings, intentional planning, financing, and extensive networking around a variety of food-housing-justice issues. We have been a servant-supporter of local government at times, its officials; and at others a social critic of city government and higher levels. We have learned that there is a definite need for strategy to be particularized, applied, and corrected by on-site practicing. We have also learned to affirm as a congregation that strategy is to be an expression of vision-theology, and not contrary to it. The end does not justify any means, regardless of how worthy. Practice of ministry is most effective when done out of comprehensive vision and strategy. Theory, strategy, and practice go together in an integrated whole.

The urban frontier, however, challenges daily the very integrity of our theology, strategy, and practice of ministry. In the words of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:

There was a time when the church was very powerful . . . the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the Church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Whenever the early Christians entered a town the power structure got

disturbed and immediately sought to convict them for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators." But the Christians pressed on, in the conviction that they were a "colony of heaven," called to obey God rather than man. Small in number, they were big in commitment . . . they brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contest. . . .⁷

King went on in his famous letter from prison and concluded that the church all too often is the "archdefender of the status quo, the silent sanctioner of things as they are."⁸ Because of its close proximity to human need on a daily basis and as a social-religious institution struggling to survive in many of our cities, the urban church ought to know that business as usual is not good enough. Shriver and Ostrom point out that eighteenth and nineteenth century city skylines were dominated by church spires. "Today, both spires and religious institutions seem to be eclipsed or replaced by commercial enterprises."⁹ Many urban churches have not survived. Some have fled to the suburbs. Still others fearfully cling to their buildings, yearning for days gone by that will never return. There are no cure-alls, solutions to every urban problem, but the writer continues to affirm ministry must be practiced wherever people are in need.

⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Christian Century, 12 June 1963: 722.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Shriver and Ostrom, 9.

Various attempts have been made toward urban renewal, luring dwellers and shoppers back to the central city. Far greater vision, strategy, and practice are needed to meet the needs of the city. Frank Mason North urges a new Christian compassion for the city.

In haunts of wretchedness and need,
On shadowed thresholds dark with fears,
From paths where hide the lures of greed,
We catch the vision of Thy tears. . . .
O Master, from the mountainside, make haste
to heal these hearts of pain.
Among these restless throngs abide,
O Thread the city's streets again.¹⁰

While moving, the question remains, is sentimental emotion enough for today's cities? The Gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem. "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace. But they are hid from your eyes."¹¹ Jesus did not only pray for the city, however, he also thoughtfully, prayerfully, and intentionally intervened in the affairs of the city and its varied peoples. Even so, the urban church is called and challenged to intervene in the lives of people, at critical times in the life of the city. What models, tools of ministry, are needed to implement the dialectical theology, strategy, and practice herein described?

Practical Lessons from the World

The church may well learn a lesson from the secular

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Luke 19:41-42 Paraphrase (RSV).

world at this point, for the practice of urban ministry raises many questions about how to most effectively respond to human need. For example:

1. How may clergy and lay leaders make best use of the limited time they often have with people, both inside and beyond the church?

2. How is what the church has to offer any different from instant religion of the media, advice columns, talk-shows, and business efforts to sell consumers?

3. What kinds of crisis intervention, planting of seeds, proclamation of the Gospel, is appropriate and helpful in urban culture?

These are timely questions which must be addressed out of a local church setting. This is where the real experience-expertise for developing a theology, strategy, and practice of urban ministry resides.

Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful Father, the God from whom all help comes! He helps us in all our troubles, so that we are able to help those who have all kinds of troubles, using the same help that we ourselves have received from God.¹²

As an urban pastor confronted by a wide variety of human needs and wearing several hats in the church, the writer has adopted a design of helping called crisis intervention. It is particularly concerned with how people respond to hazardous circumstances, events, and changes in

¹² 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (Good News for Modern Man).

their lives and environment. It takes seriously one's developmental, situational, and systemic context but focuses on the most pressing issue at hand. The handling of such close encounters of the brief type grew out of the community mental health field's efforts to see more people helpfully. Early crisis intervention theory and practice was also aimed toward seeing more people at affordable prices.

Basic research in this area was done by Harvard psychiatrist Eric Lindemann who counseled and studied bereavement reactions to the tragic 1943 Coconut Grove fire. Lindemann concluded that all people face certain hazard-situations in the course of their lives: bereavement losses, birth of a child, marriage, divorce, and other related events. Strains and stresses are involved in these events, which set in motion various efforts (adaptive mechanisms) to cope with them.¹³ Some people, because of personality strengths, support systems, previous experiences, cope better than others. But crisis creates stress in all of us. It is a vulnerable time when there is greater access to one's inner self, and openness to outside help. Ancient Chinese thought speaks of crisis as both a danger and an opportunity. Accordingly, thoughtful empathetic intervention may not only help a person or family through a crisis,

¹³ Donna C. Aguilera and Janice M. Messick, Crisis Intervention: Theory and Methodology (St. Louis: Mosby, 1978), 3.

individuals or groups of people may also grow and learn from crisis.

The treatment focus of crisis intervention is the problem that is most acute, causing the most immediate problems to the person, family, or group. The goal is not major personality or system change but restoration of normal functioning and maintenance of equilibrium.¹⁴ In the words of Caplan:

People in crisis tend to forget who they are. The therapist's role is to take charge and point out inner and environmental resources available in the patient's sphere.¹⁵

In brief, the crisis intervenor seeks to do three things with the person before him or her:

1. Make contact through listening, communicating specific concern, and let the person in crisis know you are there.
2. Focus and help the person boil down to the most pressing threat.
3. Cope with the problem through establishment of practical goals, resources to be explored, one definite decision to be acted upon.¹⁶ But how may this theory and model of intervention be applied to urban ministry? What tools are needed to practice this kind of ministry?

¹⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁶ David K. Switzer, The Minister as Crisis Counselor (New York: Abingdon, 1974), 79.

Tools for the Trade

Urban churches, like their rural and suburban counterparts, go in a number of directions. To paraphrase Schweitzer's words, however:

In a world where sermons have to be prepared, committee meetings attended, where funds have to be raised and programs planned and promoted, it is well to remember that individuals still have problems and still need a ministry.¹⁷

In the case of the urban church, often-times because of location and people-serving programs, large numbers of people come daily. Santa Monica First Christian Church averages more than 100 persons a week who come to the church offices seeking some kind of help. In addition, some 750 to 1,000 other people come to classes, social service agencies, or the Thrift Shop located in our buildings. Many of those who come are in crisis, along with countless others who reach out over the phone. Some are seeking food, clothing, bus tokens. Others are looking for work, shelter, help with government forms, or referral information. Still others are lonely, disoriented, defeated, hungry for God-people-community-empowerment.

How can the church help these people as well as nourish its own member-servants? Frankly, most traditional forms of ministry will not work. They are not effective, in that so many who come to our urban churches are mobile, in transition, and often in crisis. The writer's own

¹⁷ Kemp, 10-11.

parish the last ten years has seen a steady flow of people coming and going, even amidst the core group of congregants. The changes among extending circles of people on the fringes of the church are even more dramatic and short-term. As one local Unitarian pastor expressed it to me, "Over the thirty years of my ministry I have had several different congregations, with very few of the originals still with me."¹⁸

In this light, church programming which has depended upon people's long-term commitments and involvement simply does not work in urban areas. Shorter-term educational programs, brief leadership tenure, and ways of making the most of short-term contacts with people are essential. Recognition of urban society's visual and brief attention span is necessary to survival. This must be done along with developing alternative times, places, and programs for those who do not fit in traditional programming. The majority of our visitors in worship and church school, for example, are street people who, in most cases, come only one to three times before moving on to another location. Rural America's roots, long-term stability, and sense of extended family is seldom found on the urban frontier. New methods, models of relating, intervening, and helping people are obviously needed. Crisis intervention theory and practice holds a great deal of promise at this point.

¹⁸ Ernie Pipes, conversation with author, Unitarian Community Church, Santa Monica, CA, Fall 1986.

Crisis intervention techniques can and ought to be used a great deal in the local church in addressing and helping both parishioners and people off the streets cope more effectively. These principles and techniques, however, can also be applied to the social arena. With the support of the Administrative Board at First Christian Church, the writer asked to be appointed to the City Library Board. He did so at a critical time when there was much discussion about relocating the main library away from central city. It would have been much more inaccessible to senior citizens and in a more congested area. Selective penetration of the Library Board of Santa Monica was the first step of social intervention. Active-informed participation and encouragement of citizen lobbying stopped city leaders from relocating the library. Had it not been for this intentional social intervention, the main city library probably would have been moved. At the same time, the church's pastor and staff were able to be supportive to nearby library staff in how to constructively relate to homeless problems in the area.

A second illustration of social intervention centered around the author's appointment to and work with the Santa Monica Citizens' Working Group on the Homeless. A history of effective community organization and work on homeless issues led to the City Manager's appointment. The impact of this group upon the participants was explored in the chapter on strategy. Socially, however, its impact went

far beyond the group. Nineteen recommendations were hammered out and sent to the City Council. Most of these were approved and have been implemented, including Park Rangers and crisis outreach teams. Follow-up consultation, lobbying, even joining a clergy-lawsuit have helped to keep the recommendations alive and moving. The issues confronted by the Citizens of the Working Group were of vital interest to the church and its members, as they dealt with public safety, social services for the homeless, and ways of relieving community tensions. This urban pastor chaired and participated in this important public-social issue, not just as an individual citizen, but also as a symbolic representative of First Christian Church. Leaders of the church were regularly consulted and informed of the pastor's involvement. Recognition of various systems, cycles, community and individual needs, were taken into consideration in the course of these social interventions. The first with the Library Board involved slightly over a year, one meeting a month. The second intervention involved some six months of rather intense meetings, numerous phone calls, negotiations, and lobbying.

The crisis intervenor's role in both personal and social contexts is an assertive one of being a hope-bringer and practical problem-solver-catalyst. Crisis intervention theory and practice, as applied to urban ministry, lends itself well to ongoing synthesis. It is flexible. It seeks to mobilize and use the resources of

the given situation, and it is very pragmatic in terms of using and learning from other approaches which may work. Crisis theory also recognizes that every crisis has religious or meaning potential, and can be a genuine learning experience. The skills of achieving contact, boiling down the problem, and teaching coping behavior are transferable to most value systems. These skills can be easily taught to volunteers and paraprofessionals in the community of faith and priesthood of believers. A live-in custodian, secretary, several office volunteers, and graduate interns have been briefed in crisis intervention in the writer's context, and found to be most helpful in multiplying services. Efforts are also being made to train and place lay leaders in strategic groups within the church and community where they can bring these principles to bear. While here and now focused on the most immediate problem, crisis intervention theory and practice also takes a hopeful longer view. Various systems beyond oneself are involved, but each of us has the potential power of choice, change, and responsibility. In the words of the Scriptures, "the Kingdom of God is within, at hand, yet beyond, still to come in its fullness."¹⁹

Learning Through Ministry

Urban ministry is a good teacher, although a tough one. Various understandings have come out of doing

¹⁹ Luke 17:20-21 Paraphrase (RSV).

dialectical theology through prayer, Bible study, program planning, and being in crisis intervention ministry with people both inside and outside the congregation.

Particular learnings have included but not necessarily limited to:

1. No congregation-community center is an island unto itself. We are bound together with other Disciple and denominational urban churches.

2. Local churches need help in training, envisioning strategy beyond the immediate situation, networking assistance and larger channels for advocacy.

3. The urban church, if it is to survive and flourish, needs help in forming partnership links with suburban congregations.

For the challenge of "seeking the welfare of the city" is at best an opportunity for the whole church to rediscover its roots. It is an opening for the whole church to find a comprehensive sense of mission and ministry with all of God's people.²⁰

Turning Point Shelter provides a good example of the possibilities available to the church. Over the past five years this community comprehensive service shelter, with strong support from mainline Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish groups on the westside, has provided a training-volunteer opportunity for several hundred area residents.

²⁰ Jeremiah 29:7 Paraphrase (RSV).

Many of these volunteers have been and are suburbanites. It has not only been a consciousness-raising experience for them but this cadre has also provided a steady supply of helpers, financial support, and community advocates for the homeless. Some of them have also become instrumental in helping to start new programs for the homeless in Westwood called People Assisting The Homeless. Others have helped to expand badly needed social services and to advocate for the poor in the Venice area.

Obstacles and Opportunities

It has not been, nor will it be, easy in the future for the urban local church. For indeed the urban church certainly has not been promised or given a "Rose Garden." The practice of urban ministry, regardless of denominational affiliation, characteristically runs into problems of: money, mountain-like buildings to maintain, and missional concerns. As described thus far, partnership links, networks, dialectical theology-strategy, provide badly needed help and hope for congregations that often are tired, burned out, and ready to give up. Without strong caring-compassionate, and assertive pastoral leadership, very little will happen. The urban pastor in particular must be well-informed, study, and know the context of his or her ministry. Such leadership must be flexible, unafraid of hard work, and committed enough to stay with the challenge seven to ten years or more. This is no little matter, however, as pastoring a local church and

running varied social programs that normally go with such is quite demanding. He or she must have or develop not only basic pastoral skills but expertise in community organization and crisis intervention. Situations vary; however, these added skills are the right stuff, the right equipment for those who would take the urban environment seriously.

People pass through the urban church as if upon a conveyor belt. They desperately need to feel their worth and be helped to realize a measure of their potential. A good measure of humor, awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, plus periodic time away from the challenge is also essential to ongoing creative urban ministry, not to mention the development of peers within and beyond the local church to help one keep perspective, growing spiritually and professionally.

Obstacles abound, excuses multiply, at all levels of church life. They range from limited funds, little vision, other priorities, policies of neglect, to fear and lack of expertise. To those churches, lay leaders, and pastors dare to venture where angels fear to tread; however, these challenges of urban ministry provide a significant opportunity. The rise and development of numerous television and radio talk-shows illustrates something of the depth and width of human hunger for intimacy. The sale of videos, books, and programs of self-help exercise, positive-thinking, problem-solving methods, further bring home the

fertile field out there for practical faith. The explosion of Cocaine Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Adult Children of Alcoholics, and various other helping groups for spiritually-based community make the same point. Modern advertising has a well-funded organization theology, strategy, and practice of reaching the masses, of selling its endless wares. But does the Church of Jesus Christ?

This project has been devoted to the premise that urban ministry can be done more thoughtfully, intentionally, and helpfully. It has proceeded throughout these four chapters on the basis that the crisis of our cities and urban churches offers a rich opportunity for doing ministry and being the people of God in old yet ever new ways. Brief intentional ministry with people and institutions in crisis is not new. However, crisis intervention theory and practice, employed with an understanding of life-cycle developmental perspective, offers additional helpful tools for the practice of this difficult ministry. Dr. Charles Kemp speaks of this form of wholistic ministry:

When Peter Ainslee was ministering to the Christian Temple in Baltimore, he said on those occasions when he was having difficulty in the preparation of a sermon he would put on his hat, make a round of pastoral calls and come back with "messages seething through his brain."²¹

Even so, intervention in the lives of people and those

²¹ Kemp, 130.

social issues which affect people drive us to our knees, to the Scriptures, and to proclaim the Word with new power and clarity. The same Gospel sends us out individually and collectively to care for God's people.

It behooves us as church leaders to use every tool, aid, resource at our disposal in this ministry. Where are people, individuals, and families in their life-cycles? What transitions, situational or developmental, are people and groups going through? What developmental needs, crises, may be affecting your own leadership? Certainly the writer has been aware of his own leadership being affected for several weeks by a son in the hospital for mental drug-related problems. Concentration, interest in normal duties, has been much more difficult than usual. Where is the church in its congregational development-- childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle-age, retirement or later years before death? These are not academic philosophical questions so much as pragmatic handles to guide program planning and pastoral work. These questions further help the practitioner get a hold on what he or she is dealing with and how to proceed with the intervention.

Several years ago the author applied this particular approach to his congregation as a whole. Much of this story has already been told from a variety of perspectives. However, one further note is in order in terms of letting

go of the past and moving on into the future. How does the urban church face death, not only that of its members, in its environment, but the prospects of institutional death? Generally, the church has not been good at facing this dimension of its life. Much denial, avoidance, and dishonesty often clouds the picture. In the throes of institutional death in the late 1970s, crisis intervention-systems theory was used to help First Christian Church of Santa Monica deal with its past, present, and future. Painful grief-work had to be done over some parts of the church that were dead, and had been for years. The possibility of the church dying completely was faced, as well as the reality that the church would never be "the way it used to be." This enabled the church to look at new options for congregational life and mission, containing some aspects of the past but opening ourselves to a new future.

Hard decisions have to be made about which intervention, resuscitation, or last rites! What are our priorities going to be and, specifically, how are we going to cope with, and in our particular environment with the people we have, the resources available? Tough-love decisions of who to help, when, and how are made daily by the pastor and others on our staff based on the described theory and practice.

Much has been said about the future of Christian base

communities in Latin America and other Third World areas of the globe. The writer was privileged to visit one such community in Managua, Nicaragua, during the summer of 1986. It was a moving life-changing experience and trip. Yet, as much as we admire and learn from these expressions of Christian community, North American Christians still have to develop their own liberation theology, strategy, and base communities.²²

The development of such a theology, strategy, and practice of ministry is part and parcel of what we have been doing at old Santa Monica First Christian Church. We have been struggling to live toward the Vision of God's Shalom for the world. God's preference for the poor, the oppressed, the outcast is having its impact upon the church that gathers at 609 Arizona Avenue near the Pacific Ocean. While very imperfect, our vision is one of the whole Gospel for the whole person in the whole world. New forms of interdependent partnership, unity, and mission give us hope and courage. These are exciting times to be in ministry, indeed with both obstacles and opportunities ahead for the urban church.

Practicing Christian Base Communities

Yet perhaps the most revolutionary work to be done in the church today is that of establishing Christian base

²² Cox, 267.

communities across the land. Urban churches, because of their context and struggle to survive, are a ripe frontier for local-level models of in-depth faith, hope, and love in Christ. Theory, strategy, and practice have a unique opportunity herein to be integrated, as the church dares to rediscover its urban roots of being the people of God in mission. Renewal will come not from government or church hierarchy, it will come when the church at grassroots-level dares to hear the Gospel and assume responsibility for its life and mission. No one can, will, or ought to do it for us!

We at the local level, particularly in the urban church, are close to life and death. The Gospel individually and corporately challenges us to "choose life and live!"²³ We can choose life and move out of the victim position, beyond the survival mentality, to individual and social responsibility.

There is no one way to renewal of theology, strategy, and practice for the urban church. As illustrated throughout this project paper, there are many styles of urban ministry and congregational life with both strengths and weaknesses. There are no quick fixes. No one therapeutic approach fits all situations. However, pastoral care and counseling trained in crisis intervention skills and theory offer a promising alternative for families, individuals,

²³ Deuteronomy 11:26-28 Paraphrase (RSV).

and whole communities. The modern world, particularly in the city, needs healing communities and professionals capable of wholistic concern. This kind of intervention may take the form of: home visits, flexible short-term response, mobilization of interpersonal-social resources, and creative use of technology to serve peoples' needs.

The major problem in the development of Christian base communities in the United States, however, is the failure of most laypeople and many clergy to connect personal faith issues to social-political concerns. Separation of the sacred and the secular, the false split between biblical faith and common life, runs deep both inside and outside the church. Individualism runs rampant in our society, as Robert Bellah has well illustrated and documented in a recent best seller:

Our problems today are not just political. They are moral and have to do with the meaning of life. . . . We are beginning to understand that our common life requires more than an exclusive concern for material accumulation. Life is not a race whose only goal is being foremost. . . . We need to remember that we did not create ourselves, that we owe what we are to the communities that formed us, and to what Paul Tillich called the "structure of grace in history" that made such communities possible. We will need to see the story of our life on this earth not as unbroken success but as a history of suffering as well as joy. We will need to remember the millions of suffering people in the world today and the millions whose suffering in the past made our present affluence possible.²⁴

²⁴ Robert N. Bellah, et al., Habits of the Heart (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 295-96.

Resistance to Being the

Church in Society

A survey done by the writer for a class at the School of Theology, Claremont, revealed that a cross-section of First Christian Church members continue to think in very individualistic terms. A strong majority commented that the main effect of their living in an urban environment was coming into contact with such a diversity of people in great numbers. This was seen as threatening by some but a challenge to most to learn, grow, and serve amidst such diversity of cultures. The city was characterized as an exciting although overwhelming place to live. One lay leader was moved to poetically speak of "how big God's Family and Love is!"²⁵ Most alarming, however, was that the majority saw the church's role in the city very little different from any other place. Only one of fifteen saw the church having any role in social vision and advocacy related to urban structures and systemic change. Clergy generally saw a larger social role at this point.

Grassroots Priorities and the Clergy

A recent General Disciples sampling of laypersons across the United States and Canada revealed the following priorities for local congregations in order of preference:

²⁵ Charles W. Elswick, "A Quest for Wholeness in Religious Experience and Practice," Paper, RS402 Seminar: Psychology of Religious Experience, School of Theology at Claremont, 11 May 1987, 13-15.

(1) better Christian education programs for all ages, (2) spiritual growth, (3) family life concerns, and (4) evangelism and church growth. Social justice issues related to hunger, homelessness, war and peace, and urban concerns came well down the list.²⁶ These surveys reveal the strong independent nature of the Disciples, our freedom and diversity, but also a gap between clergy and laity. Certainly these laity priorities have to be taken more seriously, but church leaders have also got to do a better job helping people know where home is for them theologically-related to larger issues.

Beyond Individualism

Individualism clearly does not go far enough. We've seen in the last six years its cruelty toward the homeless, the hungry, and the elderly in the midst of affluence. We have a biblical mandate-vision to go deeper, wider, to intervene on behalf of people but also advocate for changes in the very systems which grind up and hurt people. Donald Capps affirms an important role for pastoral care in personal and institutional change. Using Erickson's life-cycle theory, he further asserts that "pastoral care indeed has a fundamental responsibility for assisting people in becoming better oriented in the world."²⁷ This orientation

²⁶ Ann Updegraff-Spleth, "Conflicting Issues," The Disciple, December 1986: 28-29.

²⁷ Donald Capps, Life Cycle Theory and Pastoral Care (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 13.

in the world is thwarted by three major threats: (1) moral confusion, (2) severe pain and shame, and (3) lack of meaningful ritual. People get oriented in the world not by superficially adjusting or conforming to it but by entering seriously into dialogue with God's world, its meanings, and ambivalences. Our world, man's world, and God's world often clash. Health and spiritual wholeness do not mean being "wise in our own eyes but opening ourselves to God."²⁸ For we too are city-dwellers and disciples of the One who wept over Jerusalem on his way to dying there.²⁹

Our Vocation in the City

This paper has sought to set forth a theology and strategy of presence. In brief, we are called to practice practical theology in the midst of the brokenness of the city. It is not a ministry without its critics and controversy.

Some people denigrate urban church activity, calling it Band Aid ministry. I recognize that many things we do deal with are symptoms rather than causes of urban blight, but I also believe that when people are hurt and bleeding, bandaids are better than nothing.

I also believe that some hope is better than no hope; that a sign of God's presence in the city is better than no sign. . . . The very presence of the church in the inner city is its most effective message. The church's power lies not so much in what its members say or do as who they are. The Gospel is proclaimed not

²⁸ Ibid., 120.

²⁹ Shriver, 10.

through words or well-planned programs alone,
but through effective symbols.³⁰

The church in the midst of diversity is called theologically and ethically to be a house of prayer, fellowship, worship, nurture, and service for all peoples. For the urban church this often takes the form of shelter, sanctuary, and networking to both serve and empower the people of the city. Amidst arson and violence, the church has the opportunity to give fire and suffering new meaning, as it dares to be a sign of hope and redemption. "Fire becomes a symbol of the purging presence of the Holy God, pointing us to the Ultimate hope for which the church stands."³¹ Activities to feed the hungry, provide shelter, ministries of caring, and political advocacy all have the same source, the Eucharist. Activities, as important as they are to the urban church, can never replace or be a substitute for the Eucharist, worship, prayer, or Bible study. We are first and foremost to be "the church of the incarnate Lord who so loved the world that he was born into our human life, transforming a common stable."³²

Conclusion

Intentional networking with other persons, families, and systems of support is not a Lone Ranger sort of act or

³⁰ Spong, 831.

³¹ Ibid., 830.

³² Ibid., 831.

approach to ministry. This ministry in particular needs the widespread support, correction, and empowerment of brothers and sisters in Christ. None of us can serve God alone. Companions are needed to share the journey, the struggle, the ups and downs of the challenge. The writer's own congregation has found brothers and sisters in Episcopalian and Presbyterian congregations nearby. Together, these congregations have joined in an ongoing ministry with the homeless. Allies have been found through the Westside Ecumenical Conference: Protestants, Catholics, and Jews daring to act out their respective faiths. The Bible indeed knows nothing of solitary religion. New life in Christ is vitally related to the community of faith, hope, and love. Spiritual renewal comes from people daring to live out the Great Commandment of God, neighbor, and self.

The Gospels record several different versions of Jesus speaking to a crowd of people and the hour growing late. He had compassion on those who followed him out of the cities. The disciples now urged him to send the people away so they could get some food and rest. Much to their surprise, however, Jesus said, "Give them something to eat."³³ The disciples were stunned by his request and responded saying they had only a few fishes and loaves. Jesus calmly took what they brought to him, thanked God for these resources, and encouraged them to share with one

³³ Matthew 14:16.

another. There are several interpretations to this story, but it is surely a paradigm for the urban church the last years of the twentieth century. For the urban church's resources also often seem small in comparison to the many and varied cries for help which bombard the typical pastor and lay leaders in the city.

The cries of which this writer speaks have been well-documented throughout the project and need be no further elaborated. The overriding issue is that the Judaic-Christian community, with its rich heritage of pastoral care and prophetic concern, has a unique opportunity and challenge. The congregation as a context for crisis ministry with persons, families, and decaying social systems has many possibilities. Ministry tuned in and responsive to people's crises--maturational and situational--offers the over-burdened pastor and local lay leaders a practical handle.

Lay leaders can easily learn the theology and methodology of crisis intervention. They too can become be-frienders with the homeless, the bereaved, the lonely, and many other groups of people in our churches and communities. Rooted in Jesus and the church's tradition of caring for people in need, strategic training of key laypeople can have leavening influence far beyond the community of faith. Caring-compassionate-just community organizations can accomplish a great deal more than they ever thought possible through networking, cooperative

social services, and advocacy.³⁴ Is this not empowerment of the people of God for practical ministry in the world? Is this not a means of releasing and using the power of the laity, gifts of the Body of Christ, for the sake of the world? Such is the nature of a theology, strategy, and practice of ministry that intentionally seeks to live toward the vision of God's Shalom.

³⁴ Richard Rabin, Strategic Psychotherapy (New York: Basic, 1977), 1.

APPENDIX

HELP CHARLES PASS HIS PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION CLASS AT STC!!!

SIMPLY ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS OR FILL IN THE BLANKS. THANK YOU!

1. My understanding of God or divine reality is.....

One very important religious experience in my life was.....

2. I believe the following things to be true of human nature:
(List three or more.)

3. My primary method of knowing or learning about God and human nature would be.....
(Intuition, the mind, what others tell me, the Bible, dreams, other.....)
Circle no more than two.

4. The rituals and/or symbols which best help me understand and express my faith are.....

5. Living in the city, Los Angeles urban area, affects my faith in the following ways:

(Also used as a guide in personal and telephone interviews)

The primary role of my congregation in the city is to.....

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELPFUL COOPERATION & PARTICIPATION IN THIS SURVEY.
PLEASE MAIL OR DROP OFF TO 1st Christian Church, 609 Arizona Ave., Santa Monica.
(Deadline, Sunday, April 26, 1987) 90401

COVENANT

Disciple Metropolitan Parish

The inner city ministry most closely approximates the ministry of the first century, and very probably the second century of mission and work of the Church. Paul found himself preoccupied with trying to make the Gospel alive and stable in a deadly and unstable urban situation. The urban ministry cannot deviate from the biblical mandate to preach straight-forward and meaningful sermons, to teach, to care for and shepherd those whose lives would be shattered without the support and counsel of the Church. Personal ministry in the name of Jesus must be done in conjunction with social services and advocacy.

"For God made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of His Will, according to His purpose which God set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." Ephesians 1:8-10

"We are the church of the incarnate Lord who so loved the world that he was born into our human life, his presence turning a common stable into a majestic shrine. His life transformed a cross of execution into a symbol of resurrection. Because we serve this Lord, the Christian Church is a symbolic presence that can turn the despair of the city into hope; the ugliness of the city into beauty; the destructive power of the city into redemption, and, the fearful fire of the city into cleansing truth. In the church the homeless do find shelter, those of diverse backgrounds do discover community and the hungry do gather around the altar to be fed with the bread and the wine of the Eucharist." (Christian Century)

Out of this faith, and from the context of urban ministries, we affirm a covenant for Disciple ministers of the Metro Area. We do so believing that there is a growing crisis among many of our churches and clergy. This crisis takes the form of, but is not limited to, the following: Decline of membership, morale problems, a shrinking leadership pool, inadequate financial resources to attract and hold top notch professional leadership, changing neighborhoods and a reluctance to give up old traditions which no longer fit, limited vision and strategy and the tendency to give into fear and a survival mentality.

We are not, however, without vision, hope, faith, or creativity. Indeed, it is such that motivates and causes us to come together, and to establish the Disciple Metropolitan Parish. Therefore, we the clergy of the following Los Angeles Metro area Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregations covenant together and affirm these principles:

(1) To support one another personally, professionally, and congregationally in our varied but common urban ministries. We covenant to do so thru prayer, monthly gatherings, phone networks, social get-togethers, and mutually desired programming.

(2) To work together in revitalizing the Church of Jesus Christ in the Disciple Metropolitan Parish, as it is manifested thru Disciple of Christ congregations and other manifestations of the church (national and regional). We aim to be about the main business of the church, that of sharing and bearing witness to God's Love in Christ in word and deed. It is our intention to bring integrity, wholeness and justice to the mandate of our Lord "to make disciples of all peoples." For us this involves caring for and reaching out to persons, but also caring about the kind of social, political, and economic structures which impact peoples' lives in the city.

(3) We further covenant ourselves together to be in mission in the city on behalf of our Lord Jesus Christ. Despite the temptation to abandon the inner city and downtown areas, we affirm that churches must still struggle to live and bear witness in the city. The gifts of the Spirit have and are manifesting themselves in many ways among us: ministries with older persons, ministries to the homeless, confronting changing neighborhoods, creative program building, shared ecumenical ventures, peace-making with justice, ethnic work, etc. WE CELEBRATE THESE EXPRESSIONS OF VITALITY, GROWTH AND MINISTRY, EVEN IN THE MIDST OF TRADITIONAL SIGNS OF DECLINE!

(4) We also affirm and join one another in living out the conviction that "our primary vocation in the city is simply to be the church, a community of self-conscious Christians. The Christian Church must stay in the city not because it can solve all the problems that city life raises, but because it dare not ignore those problems." (Spong)

In this spirit, we covenant ourselves and call upon the PSW Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to work with us in developing an on-going strategy of urban ministry for the Parish. Let there be increased dialogue, planning and mutual support between ourselves, Regional and General staff. In conjunction with appropriate leaders and structures, we would work toward an enlarged vision of church development that includes both the planting of new congregations and nurturing old but viable urban churches in the heart of our cities. Urban strategy calls for trained leadership at all levels of our church life, with a commitment to the church being a creative presence, an outpost, a light in the darkness which the darkness can never extinguish or overwhelm.

It is our hope that someday the Christians of the suburbs, the towns and the hamlets, will recognize that this witness is deeply important to them. Then perhaps the whole church will place its resources where the need is, not because we are generous but because our integrity as the people of God requires it.

Name	Church

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